

NCA  
VOC FOR IOP/FN  
BACKGROUND NO. 5-5619  
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MARCH 16, 1978

## THE LNG DANGER DEBATE

ANNCR:

LIQUIFIED NATURAL GAS -- POTENTIALLY A MAJOR SOURCE OF ENERGY -- HAS BECOME A MAJOR SOURCE OF CONCERN HERE IN THE UNITED STATES BECAUSE OF ITS POTENTIAL VOLATILITY. CHRIS KERN HAS A BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE FIRST TRANSATLANTIC SHIPMENT OF LIQUIFIED NATURAL GAS TOOK PLACE THIS WEEK WHEN THE TANKER EL PASO SONATRACH DOCKED AT COVE POINT, MARYLAND, AFTER A TEN-DAY TRIP FROM ARZEW, ALGERIA. BUT THE FACT THAT THE VOYAGE WAS COMPLETED SAFELY IS NOT LIKELY TO CALM THE FEARS OF THOSE WHO WARN THAT THE SHIPMENT AND STORAGE OF LIQUIFIED NATURAL GAS -- "LNG," FOR SHORT -- IS AN INVITATION TO DISASTER.

LNG IS THE SAME NATURAL GAS THAT IS USED FOR COOKING AND HEATING IN MUCH OF THE WORLD, BUT SUPERCOOLED UNTIL IT FORMS A LIQUID. IN ITS LIQUID FORM, THE GAS COULD BE A MAJOR SOURCE OF CONCENTRATED ENERGY. BECAUSE OF ITS HIGH DENSITY, LNG CAN PACK A LARGE AMOUNT OF HEATING CAPACITY INTO A RELATIVELY SMALL STORAGE TANK. INDUSTRY EXPERTS SAY IT COULD SUPPLY ONE-TENTH OF THE NATURAL GAS REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNITED STATES BY 1985, UP FROM LESS THAN ONE PERCENT TODAY.

BUT THE HIGH DENSITY OF LNG THAT MAKES IT SUCH A POWERFUL SOURCE OF ENERGY ALSO MAKES IT UNUSUALLY EXPLOSIVE. IF A SUPERCOOLED LNG STORAGE TANK RUPTURES, THE LIQUID QUICKLY VAPORIZES. AFTER THAT HAPPENS, A SINGLE SPARK CAN TOUCH IT OFF. AND THAT COULD CREATE A FIREBALL THAT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO EXTINGUISH. SUCH AN LNG HOLOCAUST TOOK PLACE IN CLEVELAND,

OHIO, BACK IN 1944. SIX THOUSAND CUBIC METERS OF THE GAS WERE SPILLED. THE EXPLOSIONS THAT RESULTED KILLED 130 PEOPLE.

IT'S THE POSSIBILITY FOR A SPILL OF EVEN LARGER DIMENSIONS THAT WORRIES LNG'S GROWING LIST OF CRITICS. IN A RECENT GOVERNMENT REPORT -- STILL NOT OFFICIALLY RELEASED BUT QUOTED WIDELY IN THE AMERICAN PRESS -- CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATORS SAID THAT LNG FACILITIES ARE SUBJECT TO "CATASTROPHIC FAILURE" AND THAT EXISTING GOVERNMENT STANDARDS ARE "CLEARLY INADEQUATE TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY."

(OPT) THE REPORT SAID LNG STORAGE FACILITIES ARE VULNERABLE TO DAMAGE FROM WIND, FLOODS AND EARTHQUAKES, THAT FACILITIES IN POPULATED AREAS ARE SUBJECT TO MUCH WEAKER SAFETY STANDARDS THAT NUCLEAR PLANTS IN REMOTE AREAS, AND THAT THE SECURITY PROCEDURES AT LNG FACILITIES "ARE NOT ADEQUATE TO DETER EVEN AN UNTRAINED AMATEUR SABOTEUR." THE REPORT, BY THE CONGRESSIONAL GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE, ALSO SAID THAT THE POTENTIAL FOR INJURY AND DESTRUCTION IN AN LNG EXPLOSION IS SO GREAT THAT THERE IS NO WAY TO COMPENSATE THE VICTIMS UNDER EXISTING LIABILITY INSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS. (END OPT)

THE LNG INDUSTRY DEFENDS ITS SAFETY TECHNIQUES AND IS PUSHING HARD FOR EXPANSION. THE TERMINAL AT COVE POINT, MARYLAND, RECEIVED MORE THAN A HUNDRED PERMITS FOR ITS CONSTRUCTION AND INCLUDES SUCH FEATURES AS A TWO KILOMETER LONG UNDERWATER PIPE-LINE INSTEAD OF AN ABOVE THE WATER CAUSEWAY TO TRANSFER THE LIQUID FROM THE LOADING DOCK TO THE STORAGE TANKS. THE SHIPS THAT CARRY LNG, LIKE THE EL PASO SONATRACH, HAVE DOUBLE HULLS TO PROTECT THE GAS CONTAINERS IN A COLLISION. THE INDUSTRY IS WORKING NOW ON SAFETY RULES FOR HANDLING LNG TO PREVENT EXPLOSIONS FROM ACTS OF NATURE OR OF SABOTAGE. BUT LNG'S CRITICS -- AND THEIR NUMBER SEEMS TO BE GROWING -- HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE THEY